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SHETLAND PONIES

Native home: The bleak Shetland Islands, located about 100 miles northeast of Scotland, have the same latitude as central Norway. The prevailing temperature is cold and the vegetation scarce. The diminutive ponies which developed under these conditions typify the tendencies of small races to develop in areas where food is scarce and the population crowded.

Origin, history, and present distribution: These ponies were known and used by the island inhabitants long before the ninth century. While their earlier history is uncertain, they are probably related to the small horse stock in the neighboring countries of Iceland, Scandinavia, Ireland, and Wales. Since the ponies made ideal small pack and draft animals, they were imported in large numbers into England for use in the coal mines and into the Netherlands for agricultural use. Reaching a peak about 1906, importations were made from England and the Islands into Canada and the United States where the ponies are very popular as children's pets. Today, they are to be found principally in Great Britain, Canada, the United States, the Netherlands, and the Shetland Islands. The Shetland is the most popular of all the pony breeds in the United States, the total number of new registrations made in 1964 being about 6,000.

Type: The original Shetland Island type ponies were built like miniature draft horses--short of legs, rather heavy set, strong, and muscular. But through selective breeding, a more saddle-horse-like type has been evolved. This more slender and stylish pony may be called the American Shetland type, or the refined American Shetland type. Both types are to be found among the registered ponies of purebred Shetland bloodlines.

Disposition: Shetlands are usually docile and tractable. Their good nature and natural intelligence make them amenable to handling and training for use by children either as harness or saddle animals.

Body Characteristics: Of sturdy compact pony build characterized by short back, fairly level croup, and well-rounded barrel; withers high and shoulders sloping; a moderately fine head carried high, with prominent wide apart eyes set on a short, strong neck. Throat latch should be clean. Bone of good quality without coarseness. Feet round and fairly large; the legs well muscled; the hind legs straight when viewed from the side and not cow-hooked when viewed from the back.

Coat: The mane and tail full and heavy, the body hair thick and, in the winter season especially, inclined to be long.

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- Color: All colors occur in the breed, including spotted (skewbald and piebald) and also palomino.
- Height: Usually between 36 and 46 inches.
- Constitution: Unsurpassed for stamina and hardiness. Longevity is considered to be a breed characteristic.
- Uses: In the homeland of the breed and in the British Isles, the Shetland ponies have been commonly used as draft animals. In America, the principal use is as a children's pet for riding and driving. In the show ring the Shetland pony may be shown in a number of ways--either as children's mounts or in harness with various kinds of hitches.
- In addition to the registry for the purebred Shetland, the American Shetland Pony Club maintains a registry for a certain type of cross-bred Shetland designated as the "Harness Show Pony." These harness show ponies are the product of crossing Shetlands with purebred Shetlands.
- Feeding: Unless the pony is being worked or ridden often and regularly, either all or most of the feed required during the spring, summer, and fall grazing seasons usually may be obtained from good pasturage. Where pasturage is inadequate, however, it should be supplemented with a small quantity of concentrates and dry roughage (generally hay), such feed to be given daily. Either oats or corn alone or a combination of oats and corn or oats and wheat bran (oats 4 to 6 parts, wheat bran 1 part) may be used satisfactorily for the concentrate portion of the ration. A mixture of timothy and clover or other good quality dry forage of similar type and composition will meet the hay requirements. The quantity of supplemental concentrates and dry roughage needed will depend on the size and physical condition of the pony, the work done, the kind and amount of pasturage available, and related factors. During the non-grazing season and when at work, most mature ponies may be kept in good condition on 2 to 4 pounds of suitable concentrates and 3 to 5 pounds of good dry roughage. Usually, such feed should be divided into two equal portions, which are given in the morning and evening. An ample supply of clean water is necessary, of course, during all seasons of the year. Moreover, provision should be made so that all animals can have daily access to salt. Either loose or block salt is suitable for this purpose.
- Breaking and training: Ponies should be broken to the halter when quite young (about 1 month of age); then taught to stand tied and to lead. The first step in training and handling, however, which is commonly known as 'gentling,' should be begun when the foal is only a few days old. It should consist of talking to, rubbing, and petting the youngster for short periods of time daily. If properly done, gentling instills a spirit of confidence for mankind in the foal,

makes it more receptive and submissive to the handler's wishes, and lays the foundation for success in future training work. During all early stages of handling and training, particular care should be taken not to frighten the foal or to make it do things it does not understand. For best results, the attitude of the trainer must emphasize kindness, patience, gentleness, and firmness. Short daily lessons are always better than long ones at infrequent intervals. Moreover, only one thing should be taught at a time, each lesson should be learned thoroughly by repeating it over and over before starting another, the same specific command, such as "whoa" and "back," should always be used for the particular action desired. All equipment such as halters and bridles should be strong, serviceable, and properly adjusted.

Breaking and training to harness, which should always precede the initiation of work under saddle, are usually begun when the pony is a yearling, that is, between 1 and 2 years of age. The first step in this procedure is to accustom the colt or filly to have harness put on and adjusted. Do this as quietly and quickly as possible, but do not have the harness fit too tight. The pupil is then taught to wear the new equipment and to be led and driven in it without pulling a vehicle.

Hitching is the next training step. This will be facilitated if a light breaking cart is available. Also, it is well to give all the early driving lessons in a quiet place (a small field or unused country lane) where the colt's or filly's attention will not be distracted by strange sounds or sights. Later it may be familiarized with everyday traffic conditions by training on a public thoroughfare. Actual work in harness usually is not done until the pony is 2 years old.

When breaking to ride, the first lesson is to accustom the pupil to wearing the saddle. The saddle girth should fit rather loosely at first and it may be well to remove the stirrups. Ponies can be taught to carry weight by fastening a light bag of sand or grain over the saddle, increasing the amount of such weight gradually over a period of several days until the maximum is reached. The first riding lessons should be made with a light, but experienced, trainer in the saddle. Moreover, such work should be of short duration per lesson and at the walk always. Ponies should be at least 2 years old before breaking to ride. If ridden much before this age, they may suffer from back or leg injuries.

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